



Coaching, Evaluating and Delivering Constructive Feedback – Learning Series

Topic Nine: Aggressive, Assertive and Deferential Language Worksheet Key

In Topic Nine “**Diffusing Difficult Situations**,” the definitions of aggressive and assertive language were reviewed. As a reminder, aggressive language is often used to express a differing opinion and is characterized by an increase in volume and hostility, while assertive language is often used to express a differing opinion and is characterized by openness and honesty. However, an assertive response can quickly turn aggressive if the tone is harsh and loud. A third language type common to difficult situations is “deferential” language. Deferential language is often used to defer to another person and is characterized by submitting to the request or wishes of someone else.

Listed below are three scenarios that describe a situation and your goal in the situation. For each scenario, write an aggressive, an assertive, and a deferential statement expressing your goal. An example is provided below:

Example Scenario: You need to finish a report due at 2:30 PM, but your co-worker really wants you to go out for lunch.

- **Aggressive response:** I don’t care about trying out the new Italian restaurant that just opened up. I’m not going to lunch with you today.
- **Assertive response:** I’d like to try the new Italian restaurant this week, but today I need to finish this report.
- **Deferential response:** I guess this report isn’t that important. I’ll go to lunch with you.

Note: You do not need to submit your worksheet; the Answer Key will be sent within the next week.

Scenario #1

In the elevator, a co-worker tells you that your manager did not return her call and now wants you to follow up on the matter.

- **Aggressive response:** It’s not my responsibility to manage your to-do list. If you want to follow-up with my manager you need to check in with him yourself.
- **Assertive response:** I have a lot on my plate and won’t be able to check-in with him for you. But he has an open-door policy and will likely make time to chat if you stop by.
- **Deferential response:** I have a lot to get done, but I can talk to him if you need me to.

Scenario #2

Before leaving for vacation you ask a staff member to follow up on a specific Premium Assistance Reimbursement payment. You send the staff person an e-mail explaining what you have done so far with the claim and what you would like him to do while you are on vacation. When you return you discover that he did not follow up on the claim and did not send you any information about it. You need to know the status of this claim before you meet with your manager that morning.

- **Aggressive response:** I asked you to do one thing while I was out, and you couldn't do it. You will take care of this follow up today in advance of my meeting with my manager this morning.
- **Assertive response:** I need you to prioritize the matter I asked you to follow up on before I left for vacation. Please let me know as soon as possible if it's not possible to get the information I requested in advance of my morning meeting with my manager.
- **Deferential response:** I'll handle the follow up on the payment issue I mentioned before I left for vacation. I need the status of the claim before my meeting this morning with my manager.

Scenario #3

A staff person who you feel works hard and is one of the members of your unit who you can routinely count on often uses profanity. You want to say something to this staff person, but feel uncomfortable doing so because he is a good worker.

- **Aggressive response:** You're profanity is inappropriate and offensive to others. You need to change your language or despite your good work, you'll be out of here.
- **Assertive response:** It has been brought to my attention that you often use profanity and it offends others. Please be more mindful of your language choices and stop using profanity in the workplace.
- **Deferential response:** I've heard you use profanity that often offends other staff members, but it's okay since you're a good worker.